

## EDITORIAL

# CONSCIENCE VERSUS AUTHORITY

The Pill controversy is now entering a new phase and unearthing an old issue: the right of conscience against the claims of authority. We are made to watch a seemingly purely conceptual bout, but yet so real that we feel nothing less than that our salvation is at stake.

This development would have been rather interesting, even welcomed, were it not for a dangerous assumption lurking behind this dramatic picture. It is the assumption that conscience and authority are conflicting notions, so that one can only hope to flourish and prosper at the expense of the other.

Here again, as in so many cases, the real culprit is theological imprecision. Conscience and authority are too delicate to be treated lightly. The location involved, its limits, and conditions must be stated always with sufficient precision, sincerity and objectivity.

It is theologically incorrect to take authority as always devoid of love, obsessed with power and oblivious of the human dignity. For authority is service, and service is the budding forth of love. Neither is it acceptable to view conscience as merely the right of thinking, speaking, writing, and acting according to one's judgment or humour, without any thought or regard to the rights of God nor the duty to Him. Both understanding will naturally lead to the unfortunate conclusion we have mentioned above.

We are aware that there are those who would tell us that the unsteady conscience seeks a sturdy norm. But yet, in the same breath, they deny the existence of such a norm, telling us that man must seek it bravely with the torment of his conscience, learning to live with darkness on every side. This is, we believe, an unpardonable affront to the wisdom and mercy of God.

God did not and does not leave man to himself but has entered history through the Word which is "the true light that en-

lightens all men." (**John 1:8**). The Word speaks to us now and enlightens us through the Church's living doctrinal and jurisdictional authority.

In this perspective, conscience and authority are not conflicting notions; within the divine ecclesial plan, each has its own place and function. Conscience is our awareness of the moral imperatives in life toward truth and virtue, our fellowmen and our God. While religious authority is the sufficient norm of our conscience, seeking not only our religious welfare here on earth, but also our ultimate salvation hereafter.

If then we wish to find our bearing during this second phase of the Pill controversy we should avoid opposing one to the other. It is not by contraposing conscience against authority that we can resolve the nagging moral problems of our times. No amount of discussion premised on this supposed conflict will lead us to truth and virtue.

It is only when we take them as two friendly, inseparable guides, distinct but complementary, can we ever hope to find our way through the ever increasing confusions regarding the Pill controversy.